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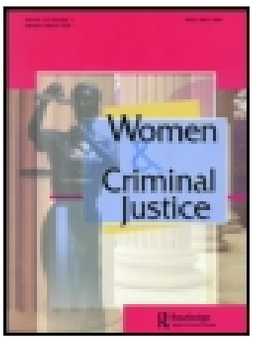
Leah Iman Aniefuna

M. Amari Aniefuna

Jason M. Williams



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Creating and Undoing Legacies of Resilience: Black Women as Martyrs in the Black Community Under Oppressive Social Control

Leah Iman Aniefuna[a*], M. Amari Aniefuna[a*], and Jason M. Williams[b]

[a]College of education, Texas Southern University, Houston, TX, USA; [b]Justice Studies Department, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper contextualizes the struggles and contributions of Black motherhood and reproductive justice under police surveillance in Baltimore, Maryland. We conducted semi-structured interviews with mothers regarding their experiences and perceptions of policing in their community during the aftermath of the police-involved death of Freddie Gray. While the literature disproportionately focuses on Black males, little knowledge is known about the struggles and contributions of Black mothers in matters concerning police brutality and the fight against institutional violence. There still remains the question regarding the role of and impact on Black mothers during matters of institutional violence against Black children. We fill this gap by highlighting narratives and lived knowledges within a Black motherhood perspective. Primary themes show that Black women are subject to terror from police and system agents, they face reproductive justice issues, as they are criminalized as mothers—and are affected mentally, but they employ various resistance strategies that strengthen their resilience. Results indicate that Black women are the backbone and martyrs of their communities, but this comes at a tremendous cost because they remain largely unprotected and subject to immeasurable institutional violence and judgment against their mothering strategies.

KEYWORDS

Black feminism; black feminist criminology; black motherhood; policing; race; reproductive justice

> A month after my father-in-law was murdered by the police, she [10-year-old daughter] can't handle it. She became a real rebellion. She wasn't acting right in school. I became pregnant, it got worse. I tried to take her and get her help, it didn't work. They turned everything on me, as far as the law … I went to the court system, and I begged them for help with my 10-year-old at the time. I said, 'I don't have the experience. I'm not a therapist, I'm not a doctor, I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a judge. Please help me, don't let my child be a statistic.'
>
> **Deborah, 51**

INTRODUCTION

Existing literature has exposed the various forms of oppressive social control of low-income, predominantly Black communities (Anderson, 1999; Brunson, 2007; Rios, 2011); however, the disparate treatment of Black boys and men dominates criminal justice discourse and perpetuates Black

CONTACT Jason M. Williams Williamsjas@montclair.edu Justice Studies Department, Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave, Montclair, NJ 07043, USA
*Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, USA.

male exceptionalism (Butler, 2013). Few studies in existing criminological literature highlight the direct and vicarious trauma that Black women face as a result of violence from police and other state actors that have life changing influence. In fact, much violence against Black women by police officers is typically under-reported, under-prosecuted, and undetected (Jacobs, 2017); this violence includes physical, verbal, and sexual assault. Critical scholars have studied the unique interactions between the justice system and Black women and girls and have uncovered the significant effect of the drug war and police violence on Black women, as well as the complex task of motherhood under state control (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gabbidon et al., 2011; Jacobs, 2017; Mitchell & Davis, 2019).

Crenshaw (1991, 1996) and the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) began the #SayHerName campaign, which aligns with Crenshaw's scholarship on intersectionality. Since 2014, the #SayHerName campaign has become an interdisciplinary beckoning call amongst Black feminist activists and scholars (Brown et al., 2017; McMurty-Chubb, 2016). Although the hashtag has been memorialized in literature and plastered across social media platforms, the continued silence of mainstream media after countless murders and brutal beatings of Black women and girls by police demonstrates the ongoing necessity for the consistent efforts of AAPF's campaign. The #SayHerName movement underscores the consequences of state violence against Black women and girls. Drawing from existing critical literature (Hill, 2018; James, 1996), we define "state violence" as physical and psychological harm and abuse perpetrated by police and other state actors with life-changing influence. Moreover, state actors include individuals working on behalf of governmental agencies, including child protective services. The present study builds upon the literature and activism aligned with #SayHerName, as we move beyond the normal distribution of a dataset and highlight the narratives of Black women to convey the significance of state violence against Black women.

In calling attention to state violence as a reproductive issue we foreground this study in SisterSong's (2020)[1] call to "analyze power systems" (para 3), and to highlight how "all oppressions impact [black women's] reproductive lives" (para 3). With understanding how all oppressive systems are indicative of reproductive issues, we also submit that for the purposes of this paper reproductive justice is about "a human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, to have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities" (para 1). Roberts (1997) is in concert with the above mentioned quotes insofar she agrees that the intersecting oppressions Black women face, in particular, are part and parcel of reproductive injustice. Thus, the injustices that Black women face inevitably trickles down onto their already existing children or their children to be, and whatever harms to be done to their children are ultimately heartfelt on Black mothers, too. For Black mothers like Mamie Till (Emmitt Till's mom), SisterSong would lament that she too had a right to see her son grow up. They would further purport that whether eviscerated via state-sanctioned or vigilante violence, the mere unjust erasure of Black children (age notwithstanding) is an affront to reproductive freedoms that Black women have been long denied since the Middle Passage and slavery.

The narratives of the Black women in the present study are the result of in-depth open-ended interviews conducted as part of a critical ethnography and phenomenological study in Baltimore, Maryland. The purpose of this study is to explore Baltimore residents' perceptions and experiences with police following the murder of Freddie Gray[2] and the subsequent protesting throughout

[1]We foreground our study in the work of SisterSong, an organization of revolutionary women of color who defined the contours of reproductive justice issues in an effort to highlight the many intersectional issues affecting women of color despite their widespread exclusion from mainstream feminist discourse primarily led by white middle- and upper-class women.

[2]In 2015, the controversial death of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man, was presumed to be caused by fatal injuries sustained after being beaten while handcuffed and detained by police. Gray succumbed to his injuries while being transported to jail for allegedly carrying a knife. Following his death, the "Baltimore Uprising" occurred, which included organized protests around the city that garnered national attention and attracted participation from people across the country

the city. Consistent with the principles of field research, the study was conducted with a hypothesis under consideration, but was exploratory in nature (Bhattacharya, 2017), especially given the acute nature of the issues under investigation. We found that the Black women interviewed in this sample experienced both direct and vicarious traumatic experiences with the police, especially after calling the police for help. It was also discovered that the Black women in this sample described various forms of oppressive social control perpetrated by the police and other state actors; however, the women regularly employ survival strategies to both avoid and heal from these violent interactions. The primary themes we extracted from our sample of narratives are that Black women are subject to terror from police and system agents, and they face reproductive justice issues, as their mothering strategies are criminalized. The historical preoccupation with stifling Black motherhood (see e.g., Roberts, 1995), in particular, presents a peculiar kind of reproductive justice issue similar to contemporary administration of justice issues. For instance, in the context of this study, disproportionate police brutality against Black youth and adult bodies who are the children of Black women is a heavily understudied area of reproductive justice with which we have found evidence in our sample. This area of reproductive justice is especially dire when victims of said violence are later pronounced deceased. Eponymous symptoms include a decline in these mothers' mental health despite employing various resistance strategies that ground their resilience. Moreover, reproductive justice also becomes a dire consequence when state violence against Black women results in bodily harm that presents irreparable damage to their reproductive organs and when the criminal label or contact with the justice system or the state surveillance apparatus prevents them from being able to find a child-bearing spouse. Thus, results from this study indicate that Black women specifically experience incomparable reproductive justice issues due to the heightened risk of losing their children to police violence or the unwarranted placement into the custody of the state. Despite constantly combating the consequences of state surveillance, our collaborators[3] demonstrate that Black women engage in what Collins (2002) describes as "othermothering,"[4] as they are the backbone and martyrs of their communities, especially in crises, but extant literature show that they remain understudied and unprotected as it pertains to police violence.

In the following sections, we explain our guiding theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Criminology (BFC), which is followed by a brief comparative analysis of the existing feminist criminological theoretical discourses. Then, we corroborate our study with a historical investigation of the striking similarities of 17th and 18th century prisons and the themes found in the narratives. Lastly, we explain our methodological procedures, and we report and analyze the narratives collected.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We ground our critical ethnographic study in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Criminology (BFC), which are both rooted in scholarly resistance to oppressive social control mechanisms and were established to fill the gaps of orthodox, colorblind criminology and legal theories (Bell, 1995; Potter, 2006). We apply the frameworks of CRT and BFC to our study,

during the highly publicized adjudication process of the several Baltimore Police Department officers involved in the death of Freddie Gray. The officers faced criminal charges but were ultimately not indicted.

[3]We refer to the participants in our study as our collaborators, rather than the common research terminology. We recognize that the invaluable perspectives of the volunteers in our study could not be added to the body of knowledge without their partnership.

[4]Collins (1990) explains the role of "othermothers," (p. 192) as Black mothers within communities sharing mothering responsibilities by helping raise and protect Black children. She demonstrates the importance of othermothers to Black communities and the institution of Black motherhood. We discuss this concept in greater detail and in relation to our collaborators' experiences in later sections of this article.

because they critically examine race and intersectionality in the context of the criminal legal system. Bell (1980, 1995), one of the pioneers of CRT, infiltrates the embedded racism in our society and affirms the matrix between race and power (Crenshaw et al., 1996). In addition, CRT brings awareness to the social structures that create social inequalities and oppression that particularly affect the lives of African Americans (Bhattacharya, 2017). It is essential to first understand the major tenets of CRT, which are the deconstruction of structural oppression, reconstruction for equality of all, and construction with equal power (Schuh et al., 2011). Similarly, BFC breaks down the concerns of the lived experiences of Black women into four themes: social structural oppression, the Black community and culture, intimate and familial relations, and Black women as the individual (Potter, 2006). These nuances are critical to include in a comprehensive analysis of Black women, as such they all have been employed throughout this study.

Although scholars have applied a gendered analysis to CRT, the theory is unable to fully capture the deeply complex nature of Black women's experiences. Therefore, BFC was created as a rigorous extension to CRT and to fill the gaps of orthodox criminology, which completely devalues the significance regarding the combination of multiple marginalized identities, such as race, skin color, sex, gender identity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, and religion.[5] Applying CRT and BFC to the phenomenon of state violence against Black women is essential because of their unique experiences with the justice system in comparison to other women. Additionally, our analysis is informed by more nuanced components of CRT and BFC, including the theoretical perspective of intersectionality. Orthodox antiracist and feminist theoretical conceptions one-dimensionally examine either race or gender, respectively. Crenshaw (1989), the scholar responsible for coining the term, "intersectionality," declares that Black women are marginalized from both antiracist policy and feminist theory, because the underpinnings of both conceptions are based on experiences that fail to demonstrate the interaction of race *and* gender. The exclusion of Black women's experiences promotes scholarship (and ultimately public acceptance) that invalidates the seriousness of Black women's struggles combating racism, sexism, classism, and any other forms of discrimination simultaneously, which ultimately leads to the erasure of their existence altogether. Intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw (1991), considers the interactions of racism and patriarchy and describes the marginalized "location" (p. 1265) at which Black women exist because of their exclusion from Black liberation and feminist movements. Theoretical contours that fail to explicitly apply an intersectional[6] perspective perpetuate this scholarly silencing of Black women's voices and discursively agree that the multiplicity of oppression for Black women is insignificant.

BFC is a framework that places Black women's lived experiences at the forefront of examination (Potter, 2006). The necessity for BFC was advocated by criminologist, Hillary Potter (2006), in her seminal article that amplifies the voices of Black women experiencing intimate partner violence. Potter later expanded this framework (2013, 2015), advocating for the application of intersectionality to "disrupt" (Potter, 2015, p. 7) orthodox criminological theory and research, which traditionally excludes Black women from analyses or inappropriately applies theories that fail to capture the intensified consequences of being Black, and a woman in addition to any other marginalized identity. In *Intersectionality and Criminology: Disrupting and Revolutionizing Studies of Crime*, Potter (2015) urges criminologists that the analysis of crime and the administration of justice is incomplete without incorporating intersectionality. Crenshaw (1989) substantiates the

[5]This is not an exhaustive list of identities that impact an individual's lived realities and experiences with police or other state actors. Race, sex, gender identity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, and religion are typically identified as some of the most salient of an individual's characteristics. We acknowledge that there are many other ways that people identify that are visible and invisible that impact how they are perceived and treated, and ultimately tilts their fulcrum of privilege and oppression in any given situation.

[6]We use the terms "intersectionality" and "intersectional" interchangeably to describe the phenomenon of multiple forms of oppression that Black women experience. In Crenshaw's original conception of the terms, she uses both variations of the term.

establishment of intersectionality with several examples of case law illustrating the state's perpetuation of Black women into an unprotected class within the margins, and she later sharpens the concept with examples of violence against Black women (1991). Similarly, Potter (2013, 2006) establishes and expands on BFC and intersectional criminology after finding evidence of the effect with intimate partner abuse on Black women. Although intersectionality can also be applied to daily encounters of microaggressions, the concept can explain the most egregious forms of abuse and violence against Black women and the subsequent rejection of them as victims. Thus, we center intersectionality in our theoretical foundation because our findings highlight the paradox of being both Black and a woman as a complex identity that can impact how Black women are perceived and treated by police and other state actors.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Du Bois' (1920) notable publication, *Dark Water: Voices from Within the Veil*, the author illustrates the consequences of seeking liberation for Black men while allowing Black women to remain in the margins. Du Bois (1920) warns, "The world that wills to worship womankind studiously forgets its darker sisters" (p. 165). The study of race and crime has universally forgotten the complexities of Blackness for women. For these reasons, CRT and BFC have been created and employed in order to examine these complexities comprehensively.

Young's (2001) study provides a historical context of the relationship between Black women and the system in the Maryland penitentiary. The present study was conducted in Baltimore, so understanding the historical landscape provided by Young's study is paramount. The Maryland penitentiary's pre-Civil War population consisted of 70% Black women and 30% white women; whereas, the post-Civil War population increased to 90% Black women (Young, 2001). Additionally, Black women were segregated from white women in more dehumanizing and restrictive quarters (Young, 2001). Black women were more likely to serve their full sentences and be denied of pardoning procedures than white women who committed similar crimes (Young, 2001). Shortly after, in 1910, Baltimore became the first city in the United States to pass a block-by-block segregation ordinance, which was followed by various other discriminatory practices (United States Department of Justice, 2016). Baltimore's discriminatory laws still systematically affect economic conditions for Black people; as a result, Baltimore is now one of the most segregated cities in America.

The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) (2016) *Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department* revealed that the 1910 block-by-block ordinance set a precedent for the Baltimore police department to have a focused patrol on the Black blocks, which still exists today. Consistent with the history of these blocks, there are visual disparities of the homes that reside in these areas, which was affirmed via our ethnographic observations. In addition, Baltimore nearly doubles the 12% poverty rate in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The Baltimore police department takes a broken windows policing approach by projecting a need for more policing of these areas. Nevertheless, although the city deploys more officers in concentrated areas, the DOJ's investigation of the city's police department proves various tactics to be ineffective, violent, and damaging to the city (DOJ, 2016).

The history of the city of Baltimore and the relationship between Black women and the state of Maryland's criminal justice system has glaring issues that can be found in low-income predominantly Black communities across the country (Brunson, 2007). The dominance of white structural and economic power stifle any potential for equal opportunities that Black women may have been afforded otherwise. Instead, the juxtaposition of power and an inherently racist state system pose a threat to the existence of Black women, and by extension, their Black children. Du Bois (1920) explains the history of Black motherhood and the relationship between Black women and the state. He declares that "[Black women] existed not for themselves, but for men. Black

women were the breeders of human cattle for the auction block … welding for its children chains" (Du Bois, 1920, p. 165). Black women's existence and their positions as mothers in the United States has been one of scrutiny and vulnerability for centuries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite gaps in literature concerning the treatment of Black women by police, critical scholars have studied and advocated for the intentional inclusion of Black women in mainstream discourse. This section reviews the existing literature regarding Black women and police terror, consequential issues of Black motherhood and reproductive justice, and various methods of creative survival employed by Black women.

Police Violence and Terror

Although the focus on Black women as victims of police violence and terror is reemerging, the work of critical scholars has historically been underscored by the one-dimensional, "all women" approach that assumes all women have the same experiences. The popular misdiagnosis of paternalism and the chivalry hypothesis have dominated much criminological discourse (Moulds, 1978; Spohn & Beichner, 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006), and consequently, Black women are inherently presumed precipitants of the violence against them or incapable of being victimized altogether (Jacobs, 2017).

The DOJ (2016) investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) highlights the unconstitutional tactics engrained within the department. Part of the DOJ's investigation found that the BPD regularly uses excessive force on individuals that are most vulnerable, including people with mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, individuals in crises, and people who pose no threat of harm or imminent danger. Women most often fell into this category of citizens victimized by BPD. The DOJ also highlighted that the BPD has a significant gender bias issue that is normalized within the department and particularly prejudices the investigation of sexual assault claims. During his interview of a woman reporting sexual assault, an officer stated, "Why are you messing that guy's life up" (DOJ, 2016, p. 122), indicating the higher valuation placed on men's lives than women's lives. In another investigation, the DOJ documented that a prosecutor wrote via e-mail, "This case is crazy … I am not excited about charging it. This victim seems like a conniving little whore (pardon my language)." The BPD officer replied via e-mail: "Lmao! I feel the same" (p. 122). Although the race of the victims in these cases are not provided, the report indicates that the BPD's cases disproportionately involve Black residents, which suggests that Black women are at significant risk for similar dehumanization.

Nonetheless, Jacobs (2017) reports that the DOJ's investigation failed to include the egregious strip search of a Black woman by BPD, which was allegedly perpetrated against her during a traffic stop due to a broken taillight. This violent encounter was not covered by national news, rather via the pages of outraged social media users. Similarly, knowledge of Korryn Gaines' murder and the shooting of her 5-year-old son was televised via live video posted on Gaines' FaceBook page, who recorded the encounter to ensure that the officers responsible for her victimization would be held accountable (Sharpe-Levine, 2019). Consistent with the disregard for Black women's lives, the family's 37 million-dollar award was rescinded by the court despite a jury's decision to award the damages more than a year ago (Jacobs, 2019).

Because of the lack of national outcry for the lives of Black women, social media provides primary access to knowledge of police and vigilante violence against Black women and girls (Hill, 2018). The public tends to learn of the most egregious cases through social media, rather than national headlines reporting the deaths and beatings or subsequent protests. Therefore, awareness

is limited to the network that individual users create and choose to consume; hence, affirming the necessity for the #SayHerName movement.

Critical scholars have led the scholarly movement for the study of unique interactions between the justice system and Black women and girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gabbidon et al., 2011). Black feminist theorists compare images of Black women as mammies and matriarchs (Collins, 2002) to police officers' need to control Black women. However, Black women remain understudied and unprotected as it pertains to police violence. Albeit important, contemporary criminological discourse highlights the war on drugs, the explosion of Black male inmates, and the concurrent murders of Black males at the hands of police (Alexander, 2011; Brunson, 2007). Thus, many negative interactions with police documented in existing literature relate to Black women and their children. Aside from physical violence, the natural consequence of policing women is the impact on their children, especially since Black women mother their communities (Collins, 2002; Jones, 1985). The next section explores the complexities of mothering for Black women under oppressive social control.

Black Motherhood and Reproductive Justice

Prior literature depicts the consequences of the criminalization of Black women; therefore, it is essential to discuss Black motherhood as it relates to state control. Police terror and the constant threat of state violence dramatically impacts Black women as individuals and as mothers. Nonetheless, some scholars have uncovered the effect of the drug war and the spike of Black women behind bars, especially as it relates to the complex task of motherhood under state control (Bloom et al., 1994; Jacobs, 2017).

The complexities of state violence, control, and hyper-surveillance are understudied in relation to reproductive justice. Activism and scholarship on reproductive justice applies an intersectional approach to the issues of access and reproductive health, sexual health, and abortion (Zucker, 2014). It is paramount to critically analyze the role of the state, including the legal system, law enforcement, and child protective services, in criminalizing and policing Black mothers in ways that mothers of other races would not endure (Roberts, 1993, 1999). We identify the risk of mothering while Black as a result of criminalizing Black mothers as a reproductive justice issue because of the lived realities of our collaborators.

Davis (1983) describes Black women as "anomalies" (p. 5) because of the strict definitions of femininity juxtaposed to Black women's laborious roles on plantations and as wet nurses. Roberts (1993) simplifies the consequences of this phenomenon as she explains the dynamic matrix of race and gender-based oppression facing Black mothers post-slavery. We rely on Roberts' (1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2012) foundational texts, as she delivers the legal context of the task of Black mothers raising their children while protecting them from the implications of the state's constant pursuit to control and detain Black bodies. Roberts' (1993) work frames our analysis, as she asserts that the white patriarchal construction of motherhood and motherwork inherently criminalizes Black women.

Relatedly, Collins' (2002) conceptualization of Black motherhood is exceptionally fitting for the current study. Black mothers in the US have long deployed mothering strategies reminiscent of those from African cultures that are foregrounded in community-based care. As Collins has articulated, these deployments of motherhood are responses to the intersecting forms of oppression they face as Black women and mothers. There are also qualitative differences in the functionality of Black motherhood, such as, her notion of "othermothers"—those stand-in mothers who are not the biological parent of a child, but nevertheless, a caretaker of the community's children in the absence of the biological parent. While the construction of Black motherhood, in particular, has always been constructed from the gaze of those who have not had to live the intersecting

oppressions of Black womanhood, Collins provides a riveting, organic exclamation of what Black motherhood is:

> … motherhood can serve as a site where Black women can express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment. These tensions foster a continuum of responses. Some women view motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labor, and makes them partners in their own oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism. (p. 191)

Collins' description of Black motherhood provides a basis from which to understand the standpoint definition of motherhood from the lived reality of Black women themselves against typically ill-conceived notions designed to conceal the real hardships associated with Black motherwork practices.

Therefore, any woman who falls short of the white-washed, elite conception of a mother is deemed deviant, criminal, and defeminized; for example, unwed mothers, unfit mothers, and women without children. The state has historically attempted to reduce Black women as mothers and fundamentally as women. Jones and Seabrook (2017) refer to the denial of Black women as mothers as the "New Jane Crow," as well as the phenomenon of the systematic seizure of Black children as property of the state. The state has kidnaped Black children as if they are chattel with no emotional relationship or physical connection with their mothers and families (Paltrow, 2012). Contemporary views of Black women as less feminine than white women and undeserving of the label of a women or as a mother are consistent with the history of white women routinely owning plantations filled with slave men, women, and children (Jones-Rogers, 2019). Roberts (2012) declares that the coercive relationship between Black women, their children, the criminal justice system, and the foster care system are interconnected mechanisms to deny the significant contributions of Black women as mothers. However, American history rests on the bosom of Black women, who were required to wet nurse and mother the children of their masters and mistresses, many times after having their own babies abducted from their wombs (Jones-Rogers, 2019).

Gurusami (2019) highlights the labor of Black mothers returning home after incarceration. The author establishes the term "decarceral motherwork" as the intentional resistance of formerly incarcerated mothers against state hyper-supervision interfering with their mothering. Gurusami's (2019) depiction of "hypervigilant motherwork" can be compared to Mullings (1997) illustration of how Black mothers dedicate most of their time to shielding their children from random street violence. Thus, Black mothers redirect their time and energy from any other needs and desires in their lives, as they are expected to singlehandedly or with the help of othermothers (Collins, 1990) shield their children from the state-manufactured threat of losing their children to random street violence (Mullings, 1997) or unwarranted seizure by the child welfare system (Roberts, 2003).

Creative Survival and Resilience

Many other experiences have unique effects on Black people due to the systemic and strategic oppression reinforced by the justice system, which are captured by Russell-Brown (2004) as "living while Black" and operationalized by Gabbidon and Peterson (2006) "Living While Black Index." Despite the horrific annals of Black womanhood and Black motherhood under state control, Black women have found refuge in various outlets, such as religion and spirituality, the arts, and education. Scholars have studied Black women's survival strategies against various sources of trauma, including witnessing community violence (Clark et al., 2008), intersectional oppression (Neal-Barnett & Crowther, 2000), intimate partner violence (Potter, 2007; Ritchie, 1996), and the criminalization of Black motherhood (Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Roberts, 1993). We apply Evans, Bell, Burton, and Blount's (2017) philosophy of Black women's creative survival to criminology to

explain the resilience of Black women resisting state violence, the matrix of domination (Collins, 2002), and the distinctive racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic suffering described by (Jones and Guy-Sheftall, 2015) as the "Black girl Blues." Existing literature provides common survival strategies employed by Black women: religion and spirituality, various forms of art, higher education, being self-reliant, exerting their energy into raising their children, being protectors of others (othermothering), and drawing strength from their ancestors (Evans et al., 2017; Everett et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2002; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; St. Vil et al., 2017).

The consequences of incarceration and motherhood have been explored for decades. Very little research qualitatively addresses Black women's experiences with police violence, how Black women persevere through this violence, and motherhood as resistance. Thus, Black women tend to suffer silently and bear their trauma. Despite the perpetual emotional and physical battering of Black women by criminal justice professionals, which we liken to a state-sanctioned "War on Black Women," Black women have certainly proven to persevere, discover creative methods of survival, and still act as martyrs in their communities.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study is generated from a larger ethnographic study on policing following the Freddie Gray incident in Baltimore. In an effort to explore a gendered analysis, the data from semi-structured interviews was partitioned for specific coding that reflected our research inquiry. This study received IRB approval by the principal investigator's home institution, and various safeguards have been followed to reduce harm and protect the participants of the study (referred to hereafter as collaborators). The central research inquiry was to examine the experiences and perceptions of Black women with the police and other state actors in Baltimore. Further, the study was guided by mixed qualitative methodological framework: phenomenology and critical ethnography. First, the phenomenological approach was employed in order to understand the phenomenon of the interactions between the Black community and police as well as other state actors following the Freddie Gray incident. Phenomenology offers a theoretical lens to understand people's lived experiences of a phenomenon (Bhattacharya, 2017). Our study exclusively focuses on the experiences of Black women with the police, as well as interactions with other state actors. Next, a critical ethnography was conducted, because it was imperative to submerge as an observer-as-participant to explore the lived realities and culture of our collaborators. According to Bhattacharya (2017), critical ethnography is utilized when social impediments such as inequality are both intentionally foregrounded into a study's investigation and readily accepted as reality by the researcher. Nevertheless, this method allowed for the thorough understanding of the surroundings, experiences, and perceptions of our collaborators.

In addition, in-depth open-ended semi-structured interviews ($N = 8$) were conducted to gather information regarding our collaborators' experiences and perceptions around the police and other state actors. The interviews averaged about 35 min each. The sample was gathered via the snowball sampling technique, and it was confirmed that each participant was a resident of Baltimore and 18 years of age or older. After deploying each methodological strategy, the data was triangulated to control for qualitative validity and reliability during the coding process.

In considering reflexivity, it was important to cogitate our positionality to participants and individual social location while taking the role of observer-as-participant. It was essential to the study that the research team consisted of individuals that were of close social proximity[7] to our collaborators. Thus, ensuring that our research team projected a sense of relatability to the subject matter and participants was important and essential for conducting research with this

[7]Our research team consists of a Black woman and two Black men, each of whom are very familiar with the lived realities and complexities of living in communities plagued by hyper-surveillance and racialized police practices.

hard-to-reach population that otherwise may not have participated in such a study. This also allowed greater access into certain gendered spaces and conversations that may not have been openly obtained by an all-male or all-white research team—also adding greater quality to inter-subjectivity inherent in qualitative research. Nonetheless, the psychometric qualities of the instrument were considered to preserve content validity, as the instrument covered a range of interpretations within the topic. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was as follows: to understand our collaborators' experiences and perceptions of police and the criminal justice system prior to the Freddie Gray incident, their opinions of the Freddie Gray incident and their thoughts on how the investigation was conducted, their thoughts more broadly on the system in Baltimore and racial implications, the effects of the Freddie Gray incident on the community and its national impact, their perceptions of community leadership, and lastly, their advice to youth to stay out of the system. Moreover, despite the omission of gender-specific questions, our collaborators innately provided answers from their social locations. Because the methodological approach was phenomenological, some unexpected underlying themes emerged, which guided the direction of the study.

RESULTS

The findings suggest that this sample of Black women in Baltimore have extremely traumatic experiences with the police in their community. The trauma from police terror described by our collaborators mimics the traumatic effects of abuse. Some collaborators described safety as trying to avoid the perpetrators of violence (police), isolating themselves in their homes, attempting to protect their children from cruelty, and "minding their business." Similar to Gurusami's (2019) study, our collaborators were determined to protect their children and the integrity of their motherhood, in spite of the threat posed by the state. Although the study investigates system-imposed trauma, survival strategies and coping mechanisms also mirror victims of other forms of abuse.

Throughout the following section, we report narratives from our collaborators on the three prominent themes: police and system terror of Black women, Black motherhood and reproductive justice, and Black women's mental health and resilience. We also intermittently report the ethnographic findings of our investigation to illustrate the holistic detriment of the community and its peripheral implications on our collaborators.

Police and System Terror of Black Women

As we traveled to the fast food restaurant where we met our collaborators, we observed the lopsided ratio of livable homes to boarded homes. There were several streets in Baltimore characterized by uninhabitable rowhouses, many of which had shattered and boarded windows and doors. Some of the homes did not have doors, altogether; however, families still occupied these decayed homes. There was also a distinct intensification of police presence as we entered the city as opposed to those communities where the number of patrol officers was minimal.

Our collaborators expressed deep fear of dealing with police. Most of our collaborators attempted to avoid the police altogether, which seemed extremely difficult because of the heightened presence. Deborah, who is 51 years old, recounted several instances of her interactions with police and other state actors, which ultimately changed her life. Deborah conveyed the impact of the terror she felt from dealing with police, as she was afraid and felt like a prisoner in her own house. As a result, she often stays in the house in order to avoid dealing with the police:

> So, my experience with the police with them coming into my home. They never asked me questions, they never looked at me, and said well, 'It's a possibility that maybe this child is the one that is rebelling.' You automatically come to my house and snatched my child. You told me I was an unfit mother. You know, you had me going from all these different programs, parenting classes—I am 51 years old. There is nothing

> you can teach me about being a mother. If I don't know that by now, I will never know … But because I love my child so much, I was willing to degrade myself, sitting in here with 18-year olds who don't have a clue about being a mother.

This is one example of the daily terror faced by one of our collaborators, and the way it impinges upon the way they live their lives. Deborah's story is distinct from Collin's (2002) description of Black mothering strategies to some extent. For instance, typically, most Black mothers will try to limit the state's contact with their children, however, the intersecting oppressions she faces are so tremendous that she believed capitulating to the state was her only way to help her child. Meanwhile, she was also keenly aware that it was indeed the state that had allowed her multiple oppressions to persevere.

Janet, who is 70 years old, expressed staying away from white police officers, because of their history of sexual harassment and physical abuse of Black women in Baltimore city. She posits:

> I stayed away from the whites, because the white policeman in Baltimore City back in my day actually, tried to, mostly, hit on black women on the side and—I mean, we went through a lot of that, we did. You stayed away from the white officers, because they were nasty. They wanted to have relations with you on the side, or hurt you or lock you up for nothing, but Black cops who were the ones that I think disappointed me to a certain degree because they seemed to be harder on Black men than the white police officers. Even today, that still exists, you know. So, as a whole with the police department, I think, for Black people in Baltimore, it was more, I don't know, it's a matter of discipline. That's all they wanted to do is discipline us.

Janet's account of avoiding white police officers reveals the perpetual cycle of terror on Black women. Janet echoes the analyses of scholars who have confronted the implications of fetishizing the bodies of Black women (Davis, 1983; Jones-Rogers, 2019). Consistent with other indicators of reproductive justice matters that undoubtedly affect Black mothering, experiences around sexual assault can have long lasting effects on Black women's ability to parent. Moreover, stories like Janet's can also have an effect on trust between Black women and the police, which may lead to a myriad of public safety risks that can put Black women and their children's lives at risk.

A common theme illustrated by our collaborators was a willingness to "deal with crooks and robbers" rather than the police. Tameka, who is 30 years old, conveyed that with "crooks and robbers you know what to expect, but with the police, it is uncertain what you'll get whether they try to physically abuse you, rape you, or kill you," which was echoed by Janet and multiple other collaborators. Collins (2002) laments that Black mothers feel the need to socialize their daughters for a world that does not see and accept them. These processes of socialization often include rejecting the politics of hypersexuality placed upon their bodies—but they also include knowing how to avoid and respond to the sure gravity of violence they are likely to encounter. Elaine, who is 43 years old, vividly detailed an instance of racial profiling that she explained traumatized her three decades earlier, at 13 years old. Contrary to widespread assumptions, Elaine debunked the myth that only Black men and boys suffer the consequences of racial profiling and police harassment:

> I was about 13. I was coming out my building in the projects, and I'm going towards Seven-Eleven. My mother sent me to the store. So police threw me on the wall. Now, remind you, I'm 13 years old. I know nothing about drugs, nothing about none of that. But I got thrown on the wall. Me and some grown adults and neighbor guys. But because I fit a description of another young lady, I fit a description of another young lady that was older than me—I'm 13. This young lady was in her 20s. I got thrown on the wall, disrespected and all this type of stuff.

Although Black mothers have passed down creative survival guides to their daughters throughout generations, these strategies have not, however, stood against the might and power of those institutions (like policing) that have long cemented Black women's subordination to the state and other classes. It did not seem to matter that Elaine was 13 years old at the time of her incident, either. Collins explains that socialization for survival often begins before the child is a preteen.

Another one of our collaborators, Tamia, who is 42 years old, insinuated that the police in Baltimore operate lawlessly. Tamia elaborated:

> See, just because you passed the academy, and you passed the test and everything is looking A-okay and you got that badge, it don't make you God. You understand? You just can't do—you got to follow rules. Everything comes with rules. You just can't do what you want.

Collectively, these Black women are impacted daily by institutional agents of power, and they are constantly fearful of what may happen to them if subject to an interaction with the police. This hinders their ability to exist on their terms, as the subconscious and conscious terror imposed by police pervades their daily routines. As Collins (2002) accentuated, Black mothers must develop creative survival mechanisms through which to survive such encounters, and these strategies are necessarily passed down to their children for the same purposes. Whether they have had direct or vicarious experiences with the police, our collaborators' narratives regarding police legitimacy and unconstitutional practices echoes the DOJ's (2016) findings during their investigation of the Baltimore Police Department. Also, the narratives above underscore the extent to which perceived police terror impacts Black motherhood. The constant threat of state intervention invalidates their authority as mothers.

Black Motherhood and Reproductive Justice

Each of our collaborators are mothers, and for some, their negative experiences with police occurred when caring for their children. Our collaborators' insight conveys that motherhood is used as a tool to control Black women. The ways in which Black women parent their children are policed, and they are punished erroneously, especially when seeking resources to help parent their children more effectively. This poses a reproductive justice threat to Black mothers, who are consequently unable to mother their children healthily and safely. The daily terror experienced from the police by Black women potentially puts their children at risk of being entangled in the system, homeless, or at risk of suffering from mental health abnormalities. These types of outcomes are due to risks of incarceration when dealing with the police or other state actors, specifically when our collaborators are sole providers and caretakers for their homes. Deborah conveyed constantly seeking help for her daughter, who kept running away after losing her grandfather, who was beaten to death by the police. She called the police out of desperation to get help for her daughter, and the police turned the blame on her, proclaiming she was an unfit mother. Subsequently, Deborah was forced to take a parenting class at 51 years old, where she was surrounded by young, teenage mothers. Deborah shared the humiliating feeling she had while sitting in a mandatory parenting class and being asked questions like, "What is an appropriate dinner: a) broccoli or b) ice cream?" Nevertheless, Deborah explained that she would continue to sit through those humiliating classes as long as her daughter could get help. Situations similar to Deborah's, unfortunately, are not a thing of the past and have been experienced by the majority of our collaborators. Such experiences substantiate Roberts' (1995) contentions around the criminalizing effects of motherhood, particularly for Black moms. Roberts has critically analyzed how the behavior of Black children has been used in ways that resulted in the criminalization of their mothers. Likewise, Deborah's experiences also underscore Collins (2002) notions of how motherhood can be both a joy, but may also result in Black mothers becoming "partners in their own oppression" (p. 191).

Another mother, Tanya, who is 35, similar to Deborah, detailed how the police and other state actors treated her when she sought assistance while caring for her child in crisis:

> My daughter started running away when she was 13–not understanding the situation, I used to call the police. The way they used to [deal] with me as a grown-ass adult. They used to deal with me like, even when they knew my age, they used to [deal] with me like I was still a teenager. You don't know–when I would call the police when my daughter ran away, I used to get told to shut up in my own house. In my own house, I used to get told to shut up.

Both Tanya and Deborah's narratives corroborate Roberts' (1993, 2012) assertions that the criminal justice and foster care system force Black children out of homes as a means of dividing Black families and punishing Black women and Black children. Once again, even when Black mothers try to navigate toward institutions positioned to help them with their kids, they are met with condemnation as their children are further marginalized and discursively taught their mothers are unfit.

Pamela, who is 29 years old, described how her children were impacted by the Freddie Gray case and the uprising in Baltimore. Throughout the conversation, she referenced multiple times how her oldest son, who is eight years old, articulates fear for his safety due to hyper-surveillance in their community and the constant harassment he witnesses. She laments:

> I explain to my children, and I got 3 boys, so, I explained to them about what's going on and how I want them … my oldest wants to join the military, so he was like, "Ma, I don't want to be like that," I said okay, Freddie Gray wasn't a bad person, Freddie Gray was a good person, and I showed him the pictures of Freddie that they have up in the city over on the other side. They have a big mural of him on the wall.

Another one of our collaborators, Michelle, who is 27 years old, describes how she engages in collective motherwork (Collins, 1990, 2002) also known as the act of engaging "othermotherhood." We asked what she tells her child and the children around her about police brutality and the series of events following Freddie Gray's murder. Michelle has an infant son of her own, but she describes how she sees her toddler godson cowering at police. She illustrates, "I haven't talked to any children personally. My godson is 3. He's too young to comprehend it right now. But it definitely affects them, because I think it just made them scared of the police."

Our collaborators' mothering experiences are examples of the theories proposed by Roberts (1993, 2012) and Collins (1990, 2002) regarding the adverse circumstances Black mothers find themselves in when responding to crises and attempting to protect their children. Our collaborators were each women who were not under carceral control; however, they were treated as suspects of the crime of mothering while Black. They identified the ways in which their mothering is scrutinized and supervised by the police and the child welfare system. Our collaborators' stories demonstrate the consequences of unwarranted hyper-supervision that fails to address the root cause of the crises; i.e., the need for trauma services for children in mental health crises. Therefore, the narratives from our collaborators portray the inadequacy of treating the trauma of Black children with criminal justice modalities rather than therapeutic trauma-centered crisis intervention. Moreover, the condemnation of their mothers (as they try to get their children help) show an institutional continuance in the denial of Black motherhood—and in the case of this sample, the mistreatment of children may be due to being born from Black mothers.

Black Women's Mental Health and Resilience

The demise of Black motherhood initiated by the system is a direct threat to the mental health of Black women. Black motherhood is a tool of resistance against the system and in spite of the system. Black women have been the catalyst of the essence of what a mother is and should be. Yet, the system consistently deems Black mothers as "unfit." However, Black women have historically proven to be resilient, particularly in their mothering, as they have been required to find ways to care for their own mental health while prioritizing the safety and health of their children and families (Collins, 2002).

Our collaborators shared various ways to survive when their motherhood is under attack. We found that our collaborators' methods of self-care are similar to those of women found in existing literature (Evans et al., 2017). Our collaborators shared that they regularly rely on faith-based support and artistic expression to maintain self-motivation and inner peace as they navigate the complexities of mothering and existing under oppressive methods of control. Deborah was required to do parenting classes after she sought help for her daughter's mental health struggles

after her grandfather was murdered by police. Deborah's family was dismantled, and she still maintained positivity and resilience. She credited her resilience to her reliance on religion and spirituality, and she found artistic expression through singing. Deborah explained how she loves to sing, as singing psychologically liberates her from her ongoing battles with the system. All of our collaborators expressed religion was their main way to hold on to hope in times of angst regarding their families. For many of our collaborators, religion became an outlet in the absence of help from other state-sponsored sources.

Collins (2002) articulated that transcendence during periods of socialization for survival is a critical tool of encouragement that Black mothers use to push their children to be better than themselves and the manufactured negative odds in which they live. They deploy transcendence by vigorously educating their children about the intersecting oppressions they face and preparing them for success far away from their current positionality. In this spirit, we asked our collaborators what advice they would give to youth to avoid discrimination from police and the annals of living in Baltimore. The most consistent response from our collaborators was for the youth to obtain higher education. Janet, Deborah, Michelle, and Pam expressed that education is a way that youth can resist becoming a part of the system. Michelle described her daily fear of living within the conditions of hyper-surveillance in Baltimore. Michelle, a student, expressed that obtaining an education would help her to get out of Baltimore, and to ultimately avoid situations where she would be vulnerable to police violence. Other collaborators echoed Michelle's sentiments. Deborah declared, "Stay in school, get an education because the only way you can beat them is with knowledge now." Janet suggested, "I would also say to them get an education … get a job, so you can call your own shots."

Thus, our collaborators shared what they felt has helped avoid interactions with police. Despite their efforts to avoid police violence, they have been unsuccessful most of the time. Each of their lives have been impacted, in some way, by state violence and control. They each described how either the threat of state violence, witnessing state violence, or experiencing state violence themselves has had a lasting impact on their lives. Our collaborators conveyed how their collective experiences have required them to persevere. Their resilience demonstrates the ways in which mechanisms of control have evolved and how the resilience of Black women has been inherited generationally. It should be noted, however, that this perseverance should not be read as a complete positive. Collins (2002) lamented how many outside the experience of Black womanhood conceptualizes their perseverance as strong and independent—yet inherent within this display of tenacity is the build-up of stress and other kinds of unhealthy triggers that are rendered virtually invisible. Thus, because Black women usher forward in the face of tremendous pressure, the absence of physical abnormality does not negate the presence of pain and sickness. For many collaborators, the pain was evident in their presence, voices, and stories, but acquiescing pain onto the bodies of Black women is old as slavery (Davis, 1983). Therefore, in the great American consciousness, the women in this study are experiencing a generational ritual.

DISCUSSION

Our collaborators shared a variety of personal encounters with police and state actors that have significantly impacted their lives and the lives of their children, which resulted in physical and psychological harm. Consistent with the concept of intersectionality described by Crenshaw (1991) and Potter (2015), our collaborators' narratives present significant implications for the study of state violence, Black motherhood, and reproductive justice that are incomparable to women of other races. In this section, we dissect our primary findings, some limitations of our study, and how our findings may guide future research, activism, and praxis.

Intersectionality, Reproductive Justice, and the Risk of Mothering While Black

The stories our collaborators shared affirm that being Black, a woman, and of lower socio-economic status implicates the heightened risk of being a mother. Our study illustrates that the risk of mothering for Black women presents an unparalleled reproductive justice issue that women of other races may not experience in the same manner because of the reality of intersectionality. Although research on reproductive justice has focused mostly on issues relative to accessibility of equal reproductive health services, sexual health and education, and contraception, our collaborators' experiences call for an expansion of reproductive justice research, aligned with the activism of groups such as SisterSong. Deborah and Tanya each indicate how Black women will constantly put themselves at risk of loss and trauma by reaching out for help, despite being denied multiple times. Consistent with Roberts' (1993, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2012) description of the state stripping Black women of their motherhood, especially when being criminalized while reaching out for help during crises. Therefore, we conclude that because of Black women's social location at the intersection of race-, gender-, and class-based oppression, they face reproductive justice threats beyond issues surrounding conception and access to reproductive health services. As a result, Black children are also constantly at risk of being traumatized or taken from their homes by simply existing as a Black child (and child of a Black mother) under hyper-surveillance. Thus, the trauma associated with the inability of Black mothers to safely mother their children presents a generational legacy of trauma. Our findings present a framework in which to conceptualize the unprecedented reproductive justice threats unique to Black women and how state violence controls several aspects of their lives.

Trauma, Resistance, and Creative Survival

The effects of the trauma our collaborators detail mirrors narratives of women in existing literature who have reported physical and sexual abuse (Potter, 2006). In addition, the constant state of paranoia from police surveillance mirrors the descriptions of Black women on parole and probation (Gurusami, 2019). Further, similar to Black men, Black women are presumed criminals by skin color and by association, and their interactions with police in their own communities have a similar dehumanizing and traumatic effect as the experiences of incarcerated Black women. Our collaborators describe the lived realities of surviving open-air prisons.

Consistent with CRT and BFC perspectives, the findings in this study suggest that the system inherently dehumanizes Black women and views them as animalistic. While our collaborators consistently expressed yielding help from the police turned into a degrading experience, they still repeated these acts out of desperation. Thus, our collaborators had no other known resources from which to seek help for their children, and in an effort to protect their offspring, they risked the consequences they would face by the police. Our collaborators in the study demonstrate both subconscious and conscious approaches to motherhood as resistance against hyper-surveillance and police terror and violence, as many describe instances of the integrity of their motherhood challenged by police and state actors. In addition, many suggest that education can be a vehicle to escape the communities ridden with police violence. Our collaborators also describe the reliance on religion, faith and spirituality to carry them through this turmoil exacerbated by the police. They also submerge themselves in the arts, such as music, which is utilized as a creative and emotional outlet to heal from the trauma they described.

It is recognized that the most effective method to address this research query was qualitatively, as state violence against Black women is typically unreported; therefore, it may be undetected via other methodologies. Some limitations to the study are noted as the absence of gender-specific questions and the sample size. Asking gender-specific questions particularly about how the current climate affects their mothering and their children may have elicited more detailed responses.

However, gendered implications were highlighted within our collaborator's responses. In addition, the narratives derived from a study that included men and women; therefore, the methodological approach served as a buffer to control this limitation. Lastly, although researchers typically value a larger sample size for generalizability of their findings, the purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of police violence and the subsequent community uprising in Baltimore. Nevertheless, the findings are consistent with and add to the body of knowledge on this topic. Future research should add to this body of knowledge to fill gaps in the understanding of Black women's perceptions and direct and vicarious traumatic experiences with police and other state actors.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the findings in this study underscore the importance of highlighting the narratives of Black women as it pertains to violence perpetuated by the police. Similarly to Black men in low-income neighborhoods, Black women are submerged in over-policed communities too. Therefore, future research cannot be complicit in perpetuating the myth of Black male exceptionalism. Black women also bear the brunt of protecting their children from the police and advocating for others around them. This is especially evident in the protests following the Freddie Gray murder in Baltimore. Vicarious and personal traumatic experiences with the police have produced a recurring pathology of broken homes and daily terror that fall on the backs of our collaborators in this study (Black women).

We found that the most imminent reproductive justice threat facing Black women in our study is the risk of mothering while Black. Black women, who live in highly policed communities are at a significant risk of physical and psychological danger because of the punitive culture of policing in cities like Baltimore. The significance of this component of reproductive justice is underscored in the stories shared by our collaborators and should be highlighted in feminist academic discourse along with other important elements of reproductive justice. If future research can incorporate the many theoretical frameworks mentioned in this study, the lived experiences of Black women and mothers can finally be known and appreciated—the future desperately depends on this rallying call. Until a more equitable society is realized, Black women will still find various methods to resist, heal, and support one another, their communities, and themselves, but at what cost to themselves and future generations of Black women and girls?

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